DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 248 UD 018 225

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TITLE A System Approach to Urban Education.
PUB DATE Nov 75
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at National Conference on Urban Education (1st, Kansas City, Missouri, November, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Students; *Economic Factors; *Educational Testing; Elementary Secondary Education; Minority Groups; Political Issues; Publishing Industry; *Social Systems; Standardized Tests; *Systems Analysis; Systems Concepts; Textbooks; *Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS *Economic Systems

ABSTRACT

Through the conceptual use of systems analysis, systems which impinge upon current urban education are discussed in this paper. Examples are offered of subsystem changes within education and ways these changes affect the results of the educational system. Relationships between urban education and the United States social and economic systems are stressed in terms of the education of blacks and minority groups. Decisions taken in the crisis provoking atmosphere of the civil rights movement are cited as examples of education's response to its social mission. Errors resulting from this response are mentioned. Within the economic system, a number of subsystems are shown to play crucial roles in urban and minority education. These include the publishing system and the business generated by the demand for textbooks and materials appropriate to new educational approaches, the system of Federal and State funded programs, and the standardized testing procedure system. In all of these cases it is asserted that the subsystems, because they possess such a capacity for employment of persons and/or generation of income, manipulate education, rather than the reverse. It is also shown that the testing system contributes to the current role of urban education, that is, a legitimization of the social and economic status quo. Academic failure of black children under this system is discussed to illustrate this problem. (GC)

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ED155248

A SYSTEM APPROACH TO URBAN EDUCATION

Paper presented at First National Conference
on
Urban Education
November 1975
Kansas City, Missouri

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A SYSTEM APPROACH TO URBAN EDUCATION

The conceptual set of this paper is oriented around system analysis. It is though that this thrust would be most useful as a framework for the analysis of urban education. No attempt will be made to allow for a holistic approach but rather it will constrict itself to the discussion of the most important systems that impinge on urban education and will present examples of subsystem changes within education that their demands initiated. The model suggests a usage of systems in order to examine the realities of urban education.

First let us examine the broad systems that are served by the educational venture. It is designed to serve primarily the social system of society. We can define "social system" in any way we wish from the very narrow perspective of community in its smallest sense to society in its broadest sense (Berrien, 1968). The expected output from education at any level is simply a functioning adult who will contribute to the well-being of the social system. Secondly, urban education serves the economic sector. The desired outcome is a profit-generating adult. Thirdly, education serves the political system, the objective being the production of the "citizen". These system delineations are broad on purpose. The are of course each in their turn composed of many sub-systems. However, the broad definitions are useful for our purposes.

First let us consider the social and economic systems and the changes in sub-systems that have been engendered in urban education in an attempt to meet their priorities. Urban education today has become socially conscious and has attempted to respond to that new consciousness by changing the direction of its social output. This is fine, but let us examine the systems impact of this

decision. Historically, the expected outcome of education was the inculcation of basic skills; this mission was lost somewhere along the way. Urban education in its rush to fulfill its new social mission under the impetus of the civil rights movement made errors in several dimensions. There were demands from the social systems and from the economic system. Urban educational systems choose to respond to the demands from a crisis perspective because they were generated out of crisis. This was a fundamental error.

The economic system, and the reference is to the broader economic system rather than the specific educational economic system, responded to the pressure of the marketplace for new hiring and promotional procedures. This system faced with first the moral then the legal demand to equalize its opportunities for the disadvantaged minorities demanded a change in the output of the urban educational system so that it could meet the demands of the political and consumer systems without a loss in profits. Simply stated, this meant the need was for more sophisticated training of minorities in basic skills. As an aside, it might be observed that sub-systems in seeking to survive will alter their outputs in order to decrease dissonance with superordinate systems (Pentecoste, 1974). The educational system in desperation appealed to the educational publishers who responded with mountains of material plus a hard sell to educational corporations. Textbooks and materials were adopted and discontinued at breakneck pace. The problem that this tactic posed has become a serious one. The appeal to the educational publishing system had the effect of changing this sub-system from its status as a supply system to that of a decision making system in the area of curriculum. Consider the implications of this. The publishing system

has as its major imput; sales to school corporations its major output; profits to shareholders. Its concern with the quality of the educational product is ancilliary to its major goals. In other words if the sale of textbooks lead to quality education - fine! If it does not and the sales hold up - still fine! When publishers drop books or materials or for that matter tests from their lists it is not based on quality but rather on sales. Remember that theoretical research to aid in marketing is not hard to come by. Evaluative research that addresses itself to the effectiveness of curriculum is either poorly done or non-existent. The major impetus towards educational evaluation has grown out of the hunger for federal funds rather than any concern with the quality of curriculum in urban education. The results of educational program evaluation seems to satisfy the hunger.

Education became the dependent variable and the economically based publishing system became the independent or manipulative variable and this is actually the reverse of what it should be. Education perceived the social demand for a new ethic and the economic sector demand for utilitarian education as a dichotomy and proceeded as though one or the other had to suffer and as a result of this perception was vulnerable to the publishing system. Educational corporations bought books and material that were high in social content and vague, at best in educational content or bought materials that were innovative in educational content and void of any social content.

In addition to the problem engendered for the educational system by the publishing system the new thrust of education towards social consciousness caused the creation of a new sub-system within its own ranks. This was the system of

federal and state funded programs. It was created out of the stasis of the educational system. When the thrust towards civil rights awakened the moral consciousness of America and institutions were faced with the demand for change the educational system saw no reason to alter its own methodology or for that matter to even examine it closely. Change was anathema to education. No attempt was made to respond to the new social urgency by utilizing its own internal resources, this would have entailed the modification of some procedures and some content in order to respond to the new social needs. It would have maintained the skills training aspect but merely added a new dimension. Instead education responded not only be asking for resources but by asking for a programmed structure to utilize the resources. This strategy allowed education two alleged benefits 1) it could maintain its structure basically unchanged and thus satisfy those elements within its system who did not desire change 2) gain extra resources in terms of money and services that did not have to be accounted for with any great precision.

The effects of this tactic was that a new sub-system evolved within the educational system. This new entity was composed of Federally funded programs. This new entity was free to independently seek its own imputs and to define its own outputs separate from the educational system. Part of its imput into the educational system was the provision of human and material resources. It was this imput that caused education in many instances to defend and attempt to perpetuate programs without regard to quality as long as the program did not interfer with the traditional workings of the system and provided resources. It was a sort of reciprocal arrangement that became symbiotic. What started

out as a simple appendage became a necessary and arterial sub-system. In other words the resource imput was vital in many cases. This development created paradoxes in urban education. In some cases the basic aims of education became lost as programs proliferated and developed objectives that were sometimes incongruent with other programs. Duplication of services has become commonplace and many times has been accepted as a way of life. There are school systems where children are fed four times a day because the several programs that they are exposed to have food in their guidelines. The response to the hunger of children was to overfeed them. The failure of the educational system to integrate itself and respond to change in a sane fashion has led to a preoccupation with whatever is popular and productive of funds and resources. Urban education seems to have the unique talent to provide the ethos in which sub-systems can develop and become semiautonomous. This milieu is perpetuated by the stubborn unilateral need of the educational system to accomodate change by remaining static and adding dynamic appendages. These appendage systems become semiautonomous and symbiotically necessary because of the refusal of education to change enough to accomodate innovation. The net result is that new approaches become part of the program subsystem rather than part of the educational system. If they could become part of the educational system then it would be the responsibility of the system to evaluate and to make decisions regarding where, when, and to what extent the innovative approaches should be used. It would also have to integrate methodologies on some other basis than the production of dollars and cents. Urban educational systems have not demonstrated that they have any desire to utilize programs to attack their deficienceies in any other manner than the production of economic resources. They have found intense comfort in the

fact that when innovation comes in as a program any failures are program failures and there is always a rationale to share in program successes.

There is yet another sub-system that has become an integral part of urban education and this is the testing procedure. The testing industry can be conceptualized of as a system. It produces several outputs. The most logical prime output is economic. The process of testing produces money. It is multi-million dollar system and from the viewpoint of the total system it is a small but vital part of our gross national product. If it disappeared suddenly, the quantity of its dollar and personnel investment would cause a disruption in the economy. This obvious output is given scant public attention. The Madison Avenue atmosphere that surrounds the sale of tests, (check your test catalogues and professional media) emphasize the psuedo-out-puts which provide the public rationale for the existence of the system. These outputs are alledged to be 1) A valid and equitable system of selection (for jobs, college entrance, etc.) 2) An objective method of ordinally ranking individuals according to ability and potential for predictive purposes. (The former could be more accurately stated as "expressed" ability and the latter is an out and out falsehood.) There are also other real outputs besides money that are not publically articulated. The main one is the provision of a method of selection or evaluation that is personally non-threatening to the selector or teacher. The minority populations of urban school systems have been ill-served by the present testing system. The easing of test criteria at the entrance level of higher education is in the process of being rethought because it had the potential of having an appreciable impact on the inadequate number of minority professionals.

The philosophical base of western civilization was rooted in the assumption that man should control nature. Its history has been a history of appropriation, conquest and exploitation. Its attitude towards conquered and dispossessed peoples has been either to destroy or to control. The path of European impearialism in Africa and Asia is an open book. The cases of the Black, Latino and American Indian are equally obvious as examples of destruction and control. In this vaunted "enlightened" age the path of imperialism leads to the stars in response to the cultural urgency to dominate nature. It is interesting to note that only the western cultures are fascinated by this enterprise and also that most individuals in the culture approve but cannot give any type of satisfactory reason for the approval even to themselves. It is after all a response to a cultural rather than an individual demand. The same rational applies to racism it also is a response to cultural rather than individual imperatives. We have only the beginning of a token representation of minority culture astronauts and it is strange also that minority cultures have not protested this to any great extent. There is nothing in the history of minority cultures that has predisposed their members to have a great interest in the control of nature. It is logical to assume that a culture that seeks to control and subjugate not only the earth but the universe as well would not hestitate, individuals not withstanding, to control those who are culturally different.

The testing system has done yoeman duty as a control agent. This in recent years has become more apparent than ever before. The work of Jensen which was extended by Shockley and carried to rediculous extremes by Esenyck used race as an independent causal variable for I.Q. The move might have been premature but the very fact that scientists found it a debatable question is perhaps a

portent for the future of non-whites in a culture that has given great credibility to the testing system. Any scientist holding a terminal research degree by the very nature of his training allegedly knows something about confidence levels and probability. Yet, test scores which by the very kindest definition are only approximations are treated as absolutes when they are used to exclude. If the present trends of testing are carried to their ultimate conclusion then the day may well come when minority people particularly blacks may have to test at a certain I.Q. level in order to stay out of retardation concentration camps or worse.

Dr. Robert Williams, a black psychologist, has done a brillant analysis on why black children score low on tests. His theory is called match or mismatch. He states that when there is a match between curriculum content and environmental experience that learning tends to be facilitated but when there is a mismatch then learning tends to be minimized. The educational, I.Q. and ability tests are by definition isomorphic to the curriculum. In short there content is similiar to the content of the educational criteria they are designed to measure. The relationships between test and educational materials is point-to point. It is therefore, not surprising that tests show good predictive power as it is a statistical given that the better the match between two variables the higher the correlation. Therefore, it can be concluded that as long as the black child is mismatched to the curriculum while the test is matched to it that the test will also be mismatched to the child. Under these conditions the test is frequently wrongfully presumed to be fair because it predicts failure accurately. If the child is matched to both the test and the curriculum the prediction will also be accurate. The correlation would be low if the child is matched to either the curriculum or the test and mismatched to the other.

Testing does have a potential for positive usage. This depends upon how the scores are utilized. If they are treated as absolutes then testing becomes a dangerous tool. If, in the educational arena, they are used to diagnose and as a guide for really trying to educate minority children then they can become positive instruments.

Whether the testing system can rise to the challenge of becoming humanitarian while maintaining its economic output is a moot question. If the total system still demands an output that assists it in fulfilling its atvaistic imperatives for control and exclusion then the outlook is bleak. The hope is that this culture will recognize that in order to survive on a planet that has been weakened perceptibly under the western ethic of subjugation that a antagonist relationship with nature or different cultures is not necessary. Testing for anything except diagnosis is archaic and counter productive.

The cold hard fact is that the system of testing has already at the third grade level or there abouts determined for minorities how many and who should be a M.D., Ph.D, or CPA. This systematic control process began in grade school with the administration of the first achievement test. The public use of this type of test is diagnostic and its objective is to facilitate the education of children. However its pragmatic use in regard to minorities is to tract and to sort, and to claim objectivity during the process.

The testing system provides urban educational systems with a defense for non-education based on objectivity. It changes the focus of education from being centered on the child to being centered on mean grade scores. It removes the onus of evaluation from the teacher where it rightfully belongs and vests

It in an impersonal system. Many times school systems cold-bloodedly change tests so that they will yield higher scores. This was recently done in Chicago. The testing system stands like the Berlin Wall between any meaningful evaluation of the teacher and the public. In short, it protects and legitimizes the status quo. Its output in terms of scores on achievement tests has been a potent determiner of curriculum materials. The social and economic systems have made legitimate demands on the urban educational systems and have been frustrated in the satisfaction of those demands. Urban education has refused to be dynamic but has rather chosen to retain archaic forms and to delegate its responsibilities to subsystems that rightfully should be supply systems rather than decision making systems. The objective of the subsystems of Education is not the exchange or transmitting of either knowledge or any mythical American way of life. The objective is to provide an output that will result in certification. At every level in the education system, elementary, secondary, and post secondary certificates are issued. These certificates (diplomas, degrees, etc.) have only one usage that is, is to provide an entry document into the economic system. The educational certificate gives the bearer the right to be hired at a certain job level in order to learn a job. This is what education is all about. It is currently being reestablished firmly in that domain. Its usage in the last quarter of the 20th Century will be one of control of entry into the job market. Its' effectiveness will ultimately be based on the extent to which the educational system can effectively gain consent for this implementation from its service population. Its ethic is derived from the fundamental assumption that man should control nature. The human being is a part of nature.

As blacks we must examine both the assumptions and the implied objectives of education. This examination and the formulation of alternative measures are germain to our very existence on any human level in the cybernetic complexities of the 21st Century.

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